

## CLAIMS

1. A method in a computing system for assessing, for a selected advertiser and each of a plurality of candidate advertising outlets, a measure of the desirability of placing with the candidate advertising outlet one or more advertising messages for the selected advertiser, comprising, for each of the plurality of candidate advertising outlets:

identifying a plurality of users that have visited the candidate advertising outlet;

counting the number of identified users that have also performed a selected set of actions relative to the selected advertiser; and

generating for the candidate advertising outlet a metric that compares the number of identified users to the number of counted users and constitutes a measure of the desirability of placing with the candidate advertising outlet one or more advertising messages for the selected advertiser.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

analyzing the generated metrics; and

selecting a candidate advertising outlet on which to place one or more advertising messages for the selected advertiser based upon results of the analysis.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the candidate advertising outlet is a web publisher, and wherein visiting the candidate advertising outlet comprises requesting a page from the web publisher.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the candidate advertising outlet is a selected portion of a web site, and wherein visiting the candidate advertising outlet comprises requesting a page from the selected portion of the web site.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising selecting the selected set of actions in response to user input.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein the selected set of actions relative to the selected advertiser are interactions with a web site operated for the selected advertiser.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein the counting is performed based upon a review of a web log generated in serving the web site.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein the selected set of actions relative to the selected advertiser include requests for web pages of a web site operated for the selected advertiser.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein the selected set of actions relative to the selected advertiser include the operation of controls presented on a web site operated for the selected advertiser.

10. The method of claim 1 wherein the selected set of actions relative to the selected advertiser include retrieving information from a web site operated for the selected advertiser.

11. The method of claim 1 wherein the selected set of actions relative to the selected advertiser include ordering items from a web site operated for the selected advertiser.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein the selected set of actions impose an order in which at least a portion of the actions among the set must be performed.

13. The method of claim 1 wherein the candidate advertising outlets are web publishers.

14. The method of claim 1 wherein the candidate advertising outlets are Internet publishers.

15. The method of claim 1 wherein the candidate advertising outlets are electronic publishers.

16. The method of claim 1 wherein the metric is generated by dividing the number of counted users by the number of identified users.

17. A computer-readable medium whose contents cause a computing system to assess, for a selected advertiser and each of a plurality of candidate web publishers, a measure of the desirability of placing with the candidate web publisher one or more advertising messages for the selected advertiser by, for each of the plurality of candidate web publishers:

identifying a plurality of users that have visited the web publisher;

counting the number of identified users that have also performed a selected set of actions at a web site operated for the selected advertiser; and

generating for the candidate advertising outlet a metric that compares the number of identified users to the number of counted users and constitutes a measure of the desirability of placing with the candidate web publishers one or more advertising messages for the selected advertiser.

18. A user characterization method performed in a computing system, comprising:

in response to user input, generating a specification of interactions that, when performed by a user on a subject web site, qualify the user as a member of a segment of the subject web site's users; and

storing the generated specification for use in identifying users of the subject web site as members of the segment.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising:  
retrieving the stored specification; and  
using the retrieved specification to identify users of the subject web site that are members of the segment.

20. The method of claim 19, further comprising:  
counting the number of identified users that have also have visited a candidate advertising outlet; and  
generating for the candidate advertising outlet a metric that compares the number of identified users to the number of counted users and constitutes a measure of the desirability of placing with the candidate advertising outlet one or more advertising messages for the subject web site.

21. The method of claim 18 wherein the generated specification specifies interactions in which the user visits a sequence of web pages in a specified order.

22. The method of claim 18 wherein the generated specification specifies interactions in which the user visits one or more specified web pages within a specified time.

23. The method of claim 18 wherein the generated specification specifies interactions in which the user activates one or more visual controls on the subject web site.

24. The method of claim 18 wherein the generated specification specifies interactions in which the user purchases a product on the subject web site.

25. The method of claim 18 wherein the generated specification specifies interactions in which the user purchases at least a minimum number of products on the subject web site.

26. The method of claim 18 wherein the generated specification specifies interactions in which the user purchases at least a minimum total value of products on the subject web site.

27. The method of claim 18 wherein the generated specification specifies interactions not completed by the user on the subject web site.

28. The method of claim 18 wherein the generated specification specifies interactions in which the user selects a product for purchased whose purchase is not completed within a selected period of time.

29. The method of claim 18 wherein the generated specification specifies interactions in which the user visits one or more pages of the subject web site on a specified day.

30. The method of claim 18 wherein the segment in which the generated specification qualifies a user for membership is a segment whose population an operator of the subject web set wishes to expand via advertising.

31. The method of claim 18 wherein the segment in which the generated specification qualifies a user for membership is a segment whose members' behavior an operator of the subject web site wishes to modify via advertising.

32. A user characterization computing system, comprising:

a specification generation subsystem that generates a specification of interactions in response to user input that, when performed by a user on a subject web site, qualify the user as a member of a segment of the subject web site's users; and

a storage device on which the generated specification is stored for use in identifying users of the subject web site as members of the segment.

33. The computing system of claim 32, further comprising a segment membership identification subsystem that retrieves the stored specification from the storage device and uses the retrieved specification to identify users of the subject web site that are members of the segment.

34. One or more computer memories collectively containing an activity specification data structure, comprising one or more indications of actions that must be performed relative to a subject web site in order to perform a selected activity,

such that the contents of the data structure may be compared to actions performed by a particular user to determine whether the user performed the activity with respect to the subject web site,

and such that such determinations may be used to count the number of users performing the selected activity who also visited a selected advertising outlet.

35. One or more computer memories collectively containing an advertising outlet inclination data structure, the data structure containing information indicating, for a selected advertiser having a web page and each of a plurality of candidate advertising outlets, the fraction of visitors to the candidate advertising outlet that also completed a selected sequence of actions relative to the selected advertiser web page,

such that the contents of the data structure may be used to select a candidate advertising outlet on which to place an advertising message for the selected advertiser.

36. A method in a computing system for performing differential advertising for a selected advertiser having a web site, comprising, for each of a plurality of publishers:

identifying a plurality of users that have visited the publisher;

establishing a first count of the number of identified users that have also performed a first set of actions relative to the web site of the selected advertiser, the first set of actions being typically performed by a first segment of users of the web site of the selected advertiser;

establishing a second count of the number of identified users that have also performed a second set of actions relative to the selected advertiser, the second set of actions being typically performed by a second segment of users of the web site of the selected advertiser;

generating for the publisher a first metric that compares the number of identified users to the first count of users and constitutes a measure of the desirability of placing with the publisher an advertising message for the selected advertiser intended for members of the first segment of users; and

generating for the publisher a second metric that compares the number of identified users to the second count of users and constitutes a measure of the desirability of placing with the publisher an advertising message for the selected advertiser intended for members of the second segment of users.

37. The method of claim 36, further comprising:

selecting one or more publishers whose first metrics are the highest for placement of an advertising message intended for members of the first segment of users; and

selecting one or more publishers whose second metrics are the highest for placement of an advertising message intended for members of the second segment of users

38. The method of claim 36, further comprising repeating the establishing and identifying for a third set of actions being typically performed by a third segment of users of the web site of the selected advertiser.

39. The method of claim 36 wherein the first set of actions are purchasing products from the selected advertiser only in a single product category, and wherein the second set of actions are purchasing products from the selected advertiser in multiple product categories.

40. A method in a computing system for assessing, for an advertiser and a selected candidate advertising outlet, a measure of the desirability of placing with the candidate advertising outlet one or more advertising messages for the selected advertiser, comprising:

identifying a set of consumers that have visited the candidate advertising outlet;

selecting consumers among the identified set of consumers to which the advertiser wishes to advertise; and

generating a measure of the usefulness of advertising at the selected candidate advertising outlet by comparing the number of selected consumers to the number of identified consumers.

41. The method of claim 40 wherein generating a measure of the usefulness of advertising at the selected candidate advertising outlet includes dividing the number of selected consumers by the number of identified consumers.



42. The method of claim 40 wherein the method is repeated for each of a plurality of candidate advertising outlets.

43. The method of claim 42, further comprising selecting a candidate advertising outlet among the plurality of candidate advertising outlets having the highest measure.

44. The method of claim 40 wherein consumers among the identified set of consumers are selected if they are known to have visited an outlet of the advertiser.

45. The method of claim 40 wherein consumers among the identified set of consumers are selected if they are known to have visited a web site of the advertiser.

46. The method of claim 40 wherein consumers among the identified set of consumers are selected if they are known to have visited a web presence of the advertiser.

47. The method of claim 40 wherein consumers among the identified set of consumers are selected if they are known to have a history of responding to a certain type of advertising message.

48. The method of claim 40 wherein consumers among the identified set of consumers are selected if they are known to have a selected demographic attribute.

49. The method of claim 40 wherein consumers among the identified set of consumers are selected if they are known to reside in a set of one or more zip codes.

50. The method of claim 40 wherein consumers among the identified set of consumers are selected if they have exhibited a selected web browsing pattern.

51. The method of claim 40 wherein consumers among the identified set of consumers are selected if they have exhibited a selected purchasing pattern.

52. The method of claim 40 wherein the selected customers have visited a portion of a web site corresponding to the selected candidate advertising outlet.

53. A computing system for assessing, for an advertiser and a selected candidate advertising outlet, a measure of the desirability of placing with the candidate advertising outlet one or more advertising messages for the selected advertiser, comprising:

a customer identification subsystem that identifies a set of consumers that have visited the candidate advertising outlet;

a customer selection subsystem that selects consumers among the identified set of consumers to which the advertiser wishes to advertise; and

a rating subsystem that generates a measure of the usefulness of advertising at the selected candidate advertising outlet by comparing the number of selected consumers to the number of identified consumers.

54. A method in a computing system for assessing, for an advertiser and a selected candidate advertising outlet, a measure of the desirability of placing with the candidate advertising outlet one or more advertising messages for the selected advertiser, comprising:

obtaining a first set of person identifiers corresponding to people previously reached by the selected candidate advertising outlet;

obtaining a second set of person identifiers corresponding to people among a target advertising audience for the advertiser; and

generating a measure of the usefulness of advertising at the selected candidate advertising outlet by determining the extent of overlap between the first and second set of person identifiers.

55. The method of claim 54 wherein the method is repeated for each of a plurality of candidate advertising outlets.

56. The method of claim 55, further comprising selecting a candidate advertising outlet among the plurality of candidate advertising outlets having the highest measure.

57. The method of claim 54, further comprising storing each person identifiers obtained among the first or second sets on a computer system corresponding to the person identifier.

58. The method of claim 54 wherein the candidate advertising outlet is a set of one or more web pages, and wherein the obtained first set of person identifiers are person identifiers received for persons visiting one or more of the web pages of the set. of web pages.

59. The method of claim 54 the obtained first set of person identifiers correspond to people to whom the advertiser wishes to advertise.

60. The method of claim 54 the obtained first set of person identifiers correspond to people having traits favored by the advertiser.

61. The method of claim 54 the obtained first set of person identifiers correspond to people having demographic traits favored by the advertiser.

62. The method of claim 54 the obtained first set of person identifiers correspond to people having web browsing traits favored by the advertiser.

63. The method of claim 54 the obtained first set of person identifiers correspond to people having purchasing traits favored by the advertiser.

64. The method of claim 54 the obtained first set of person identifiers correspond to people having advertising response traits favored by the advertiser.

65. A computer-readable medium whose contents cause a computing system to assess, for an advertiser and a selected candidate advertising outlet, a measure of the desirability of placing with the candidate advertising outlet one or more advertising messages for the selected advertiser, by:

obtaining a first set of person identifiers corresponding to people previously reached by the selected candidate advertising outlet;

obtaining a second set of person identifiers corresponding to people among a target advertising audience for the advertiser; and

generating a measure of the usefulness of advertising at the selected candidate advertising outlet by determining the extent of overlap between the first and second set of person identifiers.